

Sermon 19: Hebrews 7:1-10: The Priest-King Melchizedek

OUTLINE

The kingship of Melchizedek
The priesthood of Melchizedek

INTRODUCTION

If you had the ask the author of Hebrews what the easy truths of the faith are, and what the deeper truths of the faith are? He has already answered us at the beginning of chapter 6 that the basics include the teachings about faith and repentance, OT ceremonial practices; and the final resurrection and judgement. These young believers need to know and can chew on these in order to nourish their faith. But he also indicates that there is strong meat for the mature. In 5:10 he mentioned Jesus who has been designated by God as a priest, not in the Levitical order but in the order of Melchizedek. But you will remember in 5:11 he said, 'About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.' But having warned, assured and motivated them with their hope in chapter 6, he now returns to the meat of Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood. Chapter 7 is an extended discussion on the priesthood of Christ.

Here we come to the matter of typology, God in the OT revealed Christ in numerous ways. Promises like Gen. 3:15, and Isaiah 9:6-7 and prophecies like a king coming from the tribe of Judah, Gen. 49:10. Then there are more complex ways in which Christ is presented through types and shadows. For example, the Passover Lamb points to Christ in that He was an unblemished male lamb whose bones were not broken. But this extends to people like Noah and David foreshadowing aspects of Christ's work; institutions like prophethood; priesthood and kingship as well; events like the Passover; and even concrete things like the temple and the furniture in the temple point to aspects of Christ's person and work. You will remember in Luke 24 when Jesus had resurrected from the dead and appeared to the two disciples on the Emmaus road, how He opened the Scriptures to them showing them all the places where the OT spoke of Him, Luke 24:27, 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.' You can be sure that what we are about to see would have first been taught by Jesus to His disciples that day. The person of Melchizedek is one of the more obscure and overlooked types of Christ. Today we want to look at how the author directs our attention to Melchizedek as a king and priest to underline his overarching point. These Jews were tempted with leaving Christ and going back to Judaism, but the author is seeking to prove using biblical arguments from types, that Christ is superior as a priest to any Aaronic priest available in Judaism.

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V1-2, 'For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.' The author has just mentioned the forever priesthood of Christ in 6:20, 'having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.' Here he takes us back to the OT to open up how Melchizedek is a type of Christ.

Melchizedek only occurs twice in the OT, Genesis 14 and Ps. 110. And only the book of Hebrews in the NT. We are transported back to Genesis 14.

Abraham still Abram, has to rescue his nephew Lot. Two confederations of kings have clashed in the area, the king of Sodom where Lot had been living was one of the kings who had been overcome in battle. This left the valley of Sodom open for plunder and Lot along with his possessions was taken as war booty. Gen. 14:14-15, 'When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus.' Abraham was a great strategist and God gave him the victory. It is interesting to note that though Abraham had the power to overcome a coalition of five kings where a coalition of four kings and their forces could not. Abraham did not use his military might to take over the area but lived as an exile and sojourner in the land. Abraham brings back all the plunder, and this is where Melchizedek comes into the picture. He brings out bread and wine to feast in a covenantal meal; he blesses Abraham; Abraham pays him a tithe of all the goods. Abraham then restored the goods and people of the defeated kings while turning down the reward offered by the king of Sodom.

Now before we look at Melchizedek as a type, are we justified in doing so? Isn't this just allegorical interpretation, someone with too wild an imagination reading into the bible? No, there is good biblical warrant for seeing Melchizedek as a type of Christ. Despite there being only two references to M. Jesus is the one who teaches us to read him as a type. In Luke 20:42-43 He shows us that David's psalm is in fact speaking of Him, that Ps. 110:4 applies to Him, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."' David when he was king in Jerusalem was led by the Holy Spirit to reflect on the former King of Salem (Jerusalem); anticipating someone greater than himself who would be both a King and priest, something the kings of Judah could not do, because the priesthood was through Levi.

Who is M.? Some have thought he was the archangel Michael; some have thought that he was Shem; many have suggested that this is a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ Himself. No, M. is just another OT saint. Some have tried to use him as a noble pagan to promote the view that unbelievers using only the truths of general revelation can find God and be saved without hearing the gospel. This is fanciful thinking, we are clearly told that He is the priest of El Elyon, God Most High, This is the name of God by which Abraham swears in Gen. 14:22 and not the name of a pagan idol. As with Noah, as with Job, M. was a believer who kept his faith, and served God faithfully in the midst of pagan nations. In a world filled with Sodoms and Gomorrah's we too like M. must hold fast to God Most High. Not only is he a type but an example of faith.

Let's note the details Hebrews raises. M. was a king, in this he is a type of Christ who is the king of kings. M. was also a king and a priest. The kings of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah, and the priests from Levi, no king could also be priest in Israel but M. was both. We remember how David longed to be a priest in God's house. M. as a type of Christ was anticipating the union of these two offices. Just as Adam was a king with a priestly task in tending and keeping the Garden; Jesus too was a king and priest.

M. was the King of Salem, Salem would become Jerusalem, same place. The place where the Davidic throne would come to rest; the place where the temple would be built; the place that foreshadows the New Creation and presence of God, a king comes from this place to feast and bless Abraham and act as priest for him, receiving his tithes on behalf of God Most High. The word Salem means peace, and Jerusalem the city of peace. Jesus is the prince of peace. If you stop and think about the relationship of Jesus to peace it is truly a profound thing. He is called the prince of peace because by His death He pays our sin debt reconciling us to God and bringing about peace between God and sinners, Rom. 5:1. Paul says He is our peace, Eph. 2:14 not only reconciling us to God but to one another. Peace, the calming of our fears is what He now gives us. A fruit of the Spirit as well as a blessing we enjoy that guards our hearts and minds in Christ. And one day all war, all pain will be over, there will be no sin the cause of all our turmoil, it will be an age of peace. The place of the New Jerusalem will live up to its name. Right now Jerusalem is not a place of peace but because Christ has died and resurrected, because He will come again and judge all His enemies it will one day be the place of perfect peace.

M., the name means, king of righteousness, v2. Once again Jesus embodies all the facets of righteousness. He is the righteous one, 1 John 2:1; He is prophesied as the prince of peace who will rule with righteousness, is. 9:6-7. In Jer. 23:5-6, He is the righteous Branch and His name will be YHWH Tsidkenu, the LORD our righteousness. And when we trust in Him in saving faith we are justified in Him, 2 Cor. 5:21, ²¹ 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' He is our righteousness from God, 1 Cor. 1:30. As the King of our lives, He now makes us righteous as He sanctifies us, purifying His bride by the washing of the water of the word. And one day when He comes again He will come as the righteous judge and vanquish and punish all unrighteousness.

What beautiful titles these are foreshadowing the person and work of Christ, and please note that He is both peace and righteousness. In Ps. 85:10 when the psalmist describes salvation coming to God's people, it is described as righteousness and peace kissing each other. How can a holy and righteous judge be at peace with enemies that deserve death, how can righteousness and peace kiss? It is only through Jesus as our substitute, paying the price of our sin, satisfying the righteousness of God through His propitiating sacrifice that our sins can be fully paid for and God love and be at peace with His enemies.

The main focus though is not so much on M. as a king but as a priest. Lets look at how the text talks about his priesthood.

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V3, 'He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.' Now v3 has confused a lot of people because it makes it sound as if M. was not a true historical person like you or I, but indeed a visitation of the Pre-Incarnate Christ. This text makes it sound like he was some sort of being other than human having no parents, and no death. The author is employing a typical Rabbinic form of exegesis where the very details of how the information of the text is presented is important, as well as the silences are important. Now we are familiar with arguments from silence, we usually do not use them and rightly so. If you establish your main point based on silence then you have a bad point.

Jesus has already established that M. is a type of Himself, David has confirmed it by prophesying about a priest-king who is coming. The main point is not from silence but supporting points are now open to be developed this way. In the book of genealogies a very important man appears with no genealogy; and disappears without us hearing another word about him. More than that this man is a priest and the Levitical priests could not serve if they could not prove that their lineage was pure and legitimate. In Neh. 7:61-65 any priests who could not prove their lineage were excluded from the priesthood. M. who has no beginning and no end we are told resembles the eternal Son of God who suddenly arrives on the scene and departs with no announcement of His priesthood coming to an end at death. In Rabbinic style even these secondary inferences support the central idea of Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood and M. as a type of Christ. Levitical priests could only serve for 25 years at most retiring from serving in the temple at 50. The High priest served until death. Jesus has overcome death and so is still serving. His service never comes to an end, and no one need ever replace Him. His undyingness is key to Him fulfilling the prophecy of a forever priesthood from Ps. 110:4; and to being able to serve whatever ongoing needs we may have.

V4-10 consist in the author rallying two further key arguments to prove the superiority of Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood over the Levitical priesthood which traces from Aaron, to Levi back to Abraham. The two key arguments are the priestly functions of receiving tithes and giving blessings. In both instances we will see that the Melchizedekian priesthood is better than the Levitical priesthood. This will be shown by the fact that M is shown to be superior to Abraham from whom the Levites come.

V4-6a, 'See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham.' To appreciate this contrast we need to remember the high regard that any Jew would have for Abraham. He was revered by the Jew. So much so they actually believed that God chose the nation of Israel because of Abraham's faithfulness; that God elected Israel on account of Abraham. To Abraham the promises were given; through Abraham the blessings would come; because God remembered His promises to Abraham Israel would not be forsaken. And now we see Abraham, the great Abraham bringing his tithes to M. Abraham was the friend of God but had to give tithes to someone with authority over him. The Levitical priesthood was authorized by God to receive tithes and Israel had to obey, the implied point here is that Abraham reveals that M has a God authorized priesthood to receive his tithes.

Look at v9-10, 'One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.' To put a point on the fact that M priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood the author he speaks about Levi, in Abraham giving tithes to M. This particular verse has led to all sorts of speculation about how we inherit the guilt and corruption of sin giving rise to what are called realist ontologies in explaining how original sin affects us. It has also given rise to strange views about how we receive our souls, that we do not receive our souls by direct creation, for otherwise God would be creating sin by making sinful souls, so using this verse a view called Traducianism wrongly teaches that we

inherit our souls from our parents as well. This verse is not intended to alert you metaphysical relationships and possibilities, it is merely making a rhetorical point. And so the CSB translates it as 'in a sense'; the NASB says 'so to speak'; the NIV and ESV both say 'One might even say.' All to indicate that this is a rhetorical not literal point.

The second argument is the one of blessings. V6-7, 'But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.' Again, feel how significant this is. Who is the one through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed? It is Abraham of course, Gen. 22:18. The author is trying to show that M is superior to Abraham because he is in the position to bless the one through whom all blessings will come. Once again this is a type of the one greater than Abraham who will cause the blessings to come to and through Abraham. There has been a lot of speculation about what the nature of the blessing would be and how it relates to the serving of bread and wine. It would be very tempting to link the blessing to the Covenant of Grace between Abraham and God, and see the bread and wine as a feast which symbolizes the union between Abraham and God. We cannot help but relate it to Christ blessing us and giving us a covenant meal as a sign of God's blessing upon us.

Now for you and I many of these arguments are alien and we miss them. We do not feel how significant it is who gives the blessing and who receives it; who has a genealogy and who doesn't; who receives tithes, and if they are authorized by God to do so; these are concerns and questions that those Jews who knew the importance of these things would ask. But we all know the importance of needing a priest, someone who can stand between God and us reconciling us to God; a King a champion who will go to war for us, rule in righteousness on our behalf, who will rule us for our good and not be a tyrant; the importance of someone who cannot die who is in the presence of God, not just in an earthly temple but in the very presence of God able to secure the help of the only one who can save us. This is all of what the author is trying to prove to these Jews. They would be asking questions asking how Christianity could be true because it does not have a High priest, an atoning sacrifice, a temple, and the ongoing help of a priesthood. Here he is showing us that we have everything that we could possibly need for salvation in Christ. Now we are not Jews tempted to go back to temple worship, but this would serve as a good argument for why we should stay away from Messianic Judaism that mixes the OT with the NT, and a good reason for why a rebuilt temple with reinstituted sacrifices and feast days is not a biblical view in the Millennium. This teaching would help those who are attracted to those forms of Christianity that have a priesthood like Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy or high Anglicanism who feel the necessity of this office in the church. Here we see that we are well provided for, that all those human priests were only ever preparing us for the only priest who can bring us back to God. Our response is to rest in Christ, see Him as sufficient and press into the privileges of having access to God.